



My maiden 'Novel' blues

By BS Murthy

After letting me pen over a score of articles, though my muse prompted me to enter into the arena of fiction, yet it made me struggle to come up with the opening lines of my maiden novel for over ten days or so before "That winter night in the mid-seventies, the Janata Express was racing rhythmically on its tracks towards the coast of Andhra Pradesh. As its headlight pierced the darkness of the fertile plains, the driver honked the horn as though to awake the sleepy environs to the spectacle of the speeding train. On that, in the S-3, were the Ramaiahs with their nine year-old daughter Roopa."

But then "the train stopped at a village station, as though to disrupt Roopa's daydreams of modeling herself on the lady doctor at the Christian Medical College Hospital, and as she peeped out, the ill-lit platform seemed to suggest that the chances of her being Dr. Roopa could be but dim."

Indeed, as Roopa's father couldn't help her become a doctor, she marries Sathyam, hoping that he would help her cause, but when he fails her, feeling used by him, she insensibly seeks lesbian solace in her friend Sandhya's embrace. Later, losing her heart to Raja Rao, Sandhya's husband, she finds herself in a dilemma of love, even as Sathyam's friend Prasad woos her to distraction. Unfolding the compelling saga of Roopa's love and loss, governed by the vicissitudes of life, this 'novel' endeavor nuances man-woman chemistry on one hand, and portrays woman-woman empathy on the other.

When, in an absorbing story, these and other inimitable characters began to come alive in an intricate plot, I could sense that my maiden novel was turning out into a work of art on the Indian literary stage, and so I was desperate to live up to its completion in its poetic prose. Oh, how I feared death then, and what a relief it was as I lived to keep up with the muse to complete 'Benign Flame'!

But what a poetic justice it was that the publishers' apathy, for my literary foray into an uncharted fictional arena, pushed me into Roopa's despondent shoes, leg for leg! So to say, to atone for myself, and to earn for her the empathy, at least, of a few discerning readers, I self-published it, in which some have found freshness - "it's a refreshing surprise to discover that the story will not trace a fall into disaster for Roopa, given that many writers might have habitually followed that course with a wife who strays into extramarital affairs" – for,

after all, Raja Rao famously goads the deviant Roopa to love Sathyam too to make him happy.

Who said the novel is dead; 'Benign Flame' raises the bar as vouched for by -

The author has convinced the readers that love is something far beyond the marriage tie and the fulfillment in love can be attained without marriage bondage. The author has achieved a minor revolution without any paraphernalia of revolution in the fourth part of the novel – The Quest, India.

The author makes free use of – not interior monologue as such, but – interior dialogue of the character with the self, almost resembling the dramatic monologue of Browning. Roopa, Sandhya, Raja Rao and Prasad to a considerable extent and Tara and Sathyam to a limited degree indulge in rationalization, trying to analyse their drives and impulses – The Journal of Indian Writing in English.

Overall, Benign Flame is a unique attempt at exploring adult relationships and sexuality in the contemporary middle-class. All the characters come alive with their cravings and failings, their love and their lust. Benign Flame blurs the lines and emphasizes that life is not all black and white - it encompasses the full spectrum of living - Indian Book Chronicle.

Later, after enriching it further, I've placed this enchanting novel in the public domain as a free ebook to more acclaim that is even as 'publishing' remains the Domain of the Devil, as captured in the eponymous chapter of my second novel, Jewel-less Crown: Saga of Love, also in the public domain